DOINGS OF THE VAN LOONS

Perhaps Mother knows Father's best qualities

The Confessions of a German Deserter

Written by a Prussian Officer Who Participated in the Ravaging and Pillaging of Belgium.

(Continued from Tuesday)

A company of Hessian reserves, every one a veteran, passed with bowed heads and tired feet. They must have had a very long march. Their officers tried to make them move more lively. They ordered that a song be sung but the Hessians were not in the mood.

"Will you sing, you pigs?" cried an officer and the pitiful-looking "pigs" tried to obey this order. Faintly sounded from the ranks of the overtired men: "Deutschland, Deutschland Ueber Alles, Ueber Alles in Der Welt." Despite their broken strength, their tired feet, disgusted and resentful, these men sang their symphony of super-Germanism.

Several comrades who like myself had watched this troop pass came to

Sitting, Bitterly Crying, by the Debris of Her Late Home.

me and said, "Let us go to the camp and try to sleep so that we might forget all this."

We were hungry and on the way home caught several chickens. We ate them half-raw and then laid down in the open and slept until four o'clock in the morning when we had to be ready to march.

Our destination on this day was Suippes. Before the march started the following army order was read:

"Soldiers, his majesty the emperor, our supreme war lord, thanks the soldiers of the Fourth army and sends to them his full appreciation. You have saved our beloved Germany from the invasion of hostile hordes. We will not rest until the last enemy lies on the ground and before the leaves fall from the trees we shall return home victorious. The enemy is in full retreat and the Almighty will bless our arms further."

After this talk we gave three cheers, something which had become routine for us. And then we resumed our march. We now had plenty of time and opportunity to discuss the gratitude expressed by the supreme war lord. We could not make out just what fatherland we had to defend so far in France. One of the soldiers expressed the opinion that the Lord had blessed our arms, to which another replied: "A religious man repeating such silly sentiments is guilty of sacrilege, if he speaks seriously."

Everywhere, on the march to Suippes, in the fields and in the ditches, lay dead soldiers, most of them with hideous-looking open wounds. Thousands of huge flies swarmed on the corpses, partly decomposed, and giving off a fearful stench. Among these corpses, unsheltered under a blazing sun, were encamped wretched fugitives, because they were forbidden the use of the roads while the armies needed them, which was practically all the time.

In the evening, after a long march, we reached the town of Suippes. Here our captain told us we would find numerous frank-tireurs. We were ordered to bivouac, instead of being assigned quarters, and all going into the village were obliged to take guns and cartridges with them. After a brief rest we entered the village in search of food. Dead civilians lay in the middle of the streets. They were citizens of the village. We could not learn the reason for their having been shot. The only answer to our questions was a shrug of the shoulder.

The village itself had not suffered to any noticeable degree as far as destruction of buildings was concerned, but never in the course of the war had I seen a more complete job of plundering than had been done in Suippes. That we had to live and eat is true, and as the inhabitants and merchants had flown there was no opportunity to pay for our necessities. Therefore we simply entered a store, put on stockings, laundry, and left the old things, then went to another place, took whatever food looked good to us, and then proceeded to a wine cellar, there to seize as much as our hearts desired. The men of the ammunition column, located in the village as well as the sanitary soldiers and cavalry by the hundreds, searched the houses and took whatever they liked best. The finest and largest business places in Suippes served a very large rural district surrounding and therefore were stocked up on almost everything. Within a short time these places had been cleaned out. The munition drivers and train columns carried away old pieces of silk, ladies' dresses, linens, shoes, dress goods and every other article imaginable, and stored them away in their ammunition cases. They took children's and women's shoes, and everything else they could lay their hands upon, although many of these articles had to be thrown away shortly afterward. Later, when the field post was developed and gave regular service, many of these things were sent home.

A large chocolate factory was robbed completely, and chocolate and candy in heaps were trampled in the ground. Empty houses were broken into and wrecked, wine cellars cleaned out and windows smashed, the latter being a special pastime of the cavalrymen. As we had to pass the night in the open, we tried to find some quilts and entered a grocery store and a market place. The store was partly demolished, but the apartment upstairs was as yet intact with all the rooms locked. It was evident that a woman's hand had worked in this house, for everything was neat and cozy. But all this order was still surpassed by the arrangement in a large room, which apparently had been inhabited by a young woman. We were almost ashamed to enter the sanctuary. To our astonishment we saw hanging on the wall opposite the door a picture burned in wood and under it a German verse: "Honor the women, they weave a braid of heavenly roses in their earthly life." (Schiller). The owner apparently was a young bride, for in the wardrobe was a trousseau, tied with neat blue ribbons, carefully put away. All the wardrobe drawers lay open. Nothing was touched here. When we visited the same place the next morning, impelled by some impulse, we found everything in that house destroyed. Barbarians had gone through this home, and with bitter ruthlessness had devastated everything, with every evidence of having utterly cast off the ethics and standards of civilized races.

The entire trousseau had been torn from the drawers and thrown partly on the floor. Pictures, photographs, mirrors, everything was in pieces. The three of us who had entered the room clenched our fists with impotent wrath.

We received orders to remain in Suippes until further notice and the next day witnessed the return of many fugitives. They came in great throngs from the direction of Chalons-sur-Marne. They found instead of the peaceful homes they had left a wretched and deserted ruin. A furniture dealer returned to his store, as we stood in front of his house. He broke down when he viewed the remains of his enterprise. Everything had been taken away. We approached the man. He was a Jew and spoke German. When he calmed down a little he told us that his store had contained merchandise worth more than 8,000 francs.

"Had the soldiers only taken what they needed for themselves," he said, "I would be satisfied, for I did not expect anything else. But I never would have believed of the Germans that they would have destroyed everything."

Not even a cup and saucer were left in this man's house. He had a wife and five children, but had no idea of what had become of them. And there were many more like him.

The following night, remaining in Suippes, we were again obliged to camp in the open "because it swarmed with frank-tireurs." Such were our instructions. In reality nothing was seen of frank-tireurs, but by this method the enmity toward the people living in the towns along our line of march was maintained. The Germans practiced the theory that the soldiers fight better and are more amenable to discipline when filled with hatred of their enemies.

Devastated Everything.

The next day we were obliged to march to Chalons-sur-Marne. This was one of the hardest days we ever had. From the very beginning, as we began our journey, the sun blazed down upon us. It is about 35 kilometers from Suippes to Chalons-sur-Marne. This distance would not have been so bad, despite the heat; we had already made longer marches; but the beautiful road from Suippes to Chalons goes with unending monotony without so much as a curve or a bend to the right or left. As far as we could see it stretched before us like a long white snake.

Many soldiers fainted or were stricken with sunstroke. They were picked up by the infirmary columns which followed. That the troops who had traversed this road before us had fared worse was evident from the many dead Germans who lay along the road. The commander feared that he could not get the machine in motion again if it was halted, and permitted to stretch its weary limbs on the ground for a brief rest. And so it crept along like a snail. Only, instead of having a snail's shell on its back, there was a leaden burden.

The monotony of the march was broken when we reached the enormous camp at Chalons. This is one of the largest of the French army camps. We saw Chalons from the distance. As we halted about an hour later outside the city in an orchard, without a single exception every man fell to the ground exhausted. The field kitchens were soon brought up, but the men were too tired to eat. We did eat later and then wanted to go to town to purchase some articles, particularly tobacco, which we missed most. Nobody was allowed to leave camp. We were told that entering the city was strictly forbidden. Chalons had paid a war contribution and therefore no one was permitted in the city.

We heard the dull sounds of the cannon in the distance and suspected that our rest would be brief. The rolling of gunfire continued to grow stronger. We did not know then that a fight had begun which was destined to become fatal to the Germans.

The first day's battle of the Marne had begun!

CHAPTER VI.

At 12 o'clock, midnight, we were alarmed and half an hour later were on the march. The cool night air felt good, and despite our weariness, we made rapid progress. Toward four o'clock in the morning we arrived at Cheppy. It had been completely plundered. We halted here for a brief rest and watched preparations being made for the execution of two frac-tireurs. They were two little farmers who had supposedly concealed a French machine gun with its crew from the Germans. The sentence was executed in such a way that the people were shown who their real rulers now were.

The little town of Pogny, located midway between Chalons-sur-Marne and Vitry-le-Francois, fared no better than Cheppy, a fact which we discovered when we entered there at nine o'clock.

We were now considerably nearer the spot where the guns were roaring, and retiring of wounded and the munition columns showed us that west of Vitry-le-Francois, a terrible battle raged. At four o'clock in the afternoon, we arrived at Vitry-le-Francois after a forced march. The city was filled with wounded, but the town itself was not damaged. The battle must have been going badly for the Germans because we were ordered into action without being given any rest. We were within three kilometers of the battle line, when we came within reach of hostile fire, a terrific hail of shells tore up every foot of ground. Thousands of corpses of German soldiers indicated at what enormous cost the Germans had brought up all available reserves. The French did everything they could to prevent the Germans from getting the reserves into action and increased the artillery fire to unheard-of violence. It seemed impossible for us to be able to break through this barrage. We saw hundreds of shells exploding every minute. We were ordered to run the gauntlet of this hell in single file.

Lying prone upon the ground, we saw how the first of our men attempted to pass. They ran, unmindful of the shells bursting around them, like madmen; others were buried under ground thrown up by the high-power explosives, or torn by shrapnel or grenades. Two men had scarcely reached the line when a well-directed shot from a gun of a large caliber burst directly at their feet. When the smoke cleared, there was no trace of the men.

You can imagine the feelings of those who lay on the ground not 100 feet away witnessing this spectacle, and waiting their turn.

An officer cried: "Next!" It was my turn. As if aroused from a nightmare, I sprang up, my gun in my right hand, sidearm in my left, and ran ahead. I dodged two shells just as they burst and ran close to several others, bursting the same instant. A number of times I sprang back, then ahead again, running to and fro like a madman, seeking a loophole. But everywhere there was iron and fire. I ran like a hunted animal seeking a way to pass to save myself, with a hell in front of me, and an officer's revolver always ready behind.

Throwing caution to the winds, prepared to meet death and the devil himself, I at last ran blindly ahead; ran, ran, ran, until someone seized my coat tail and shouted in my ear:

"Here we are. Are you wounded? You had better look. Perhaps you are wounded and don't know it."

I was among those of my comrades who had gotten through. Trembling all over, I stopped and looked around.

"Sit down and you will feel better," said one of the men. "We also have trembled."

Presently some wounded were brought up. There were about 48 men and a sergeant took command. Nothing more was seen of our officers.

We continued to advance and passed several German batteries. Many had suffered heavily in dead and wounded, which lay around their guns destroyed by enemy fire. Other batteries still manned were useless because no more ammunition could be gotten through.

We paused to rest. Several artillerymen approached us, and a noncommissioned officer asked them why they did not fire.

"Because we have used up all our ammunition," was the answer of one of the battery men.

"Is it impossible to bring ammunition through this barrage?"

"No," replied the artilleryman, "but there is no more ammunition. That is why we cannot get any. At Neufchateau we started like wild men after the enemy. Man and beast died from the heat, railroads and other mediums of transportation were left in their damaged condition in the wild excitement of victory, as we dashed into the heart of France. We raced on, blindly and thoughtlessly, thereby interrupting communication with our bases, ran directly into the trap set for us by the French. Before the first ammunition and other relief supplies reach us we will all be killed."

Up to this time we had trusted blindly in the invincible strategy of our great general staff. Now it was brought home to us on all sides that the French were fighting at home, close to their greatest source of supply, and had excellent railroad connections at their disposal. Further than that the French maintained a terrible artillery fire from guns of far greater caliber than we believed they owned. This led us to the conclusion that they were occupying positions which had been prepared for a long time. Yet we believed that the picture painted by the artilleryman had been too black. We were soon to know better.

As we approached the enemy's trenches, we were met with a heavy machine gun fire, and in double-quick step hurried to the temporary protection of hastily thrown up dugouts. A hard rain had set in. The field around us was covered with dead and wounded. Even our trench was filled with wounded, which made its occupation by the defenders difficult. Many of the wounded men were paralyzed from lying on the slimy ground. All were without bandages. They begged for bread and water, but we had none for ourselves. They pleaded piteously, just for a scrap of bread. Many of them had lain in this inferno for two days, without having eaten anything whatever.

We were scarcely established when the French attacked en masse. The occupants of these trenches, whom we had re-enforced had already repulsed several of these attacks. They urged us to shoot and fired wildly themselves into the ranks of the advancing masses. We responded to the exhortations of the infantry officers: "Fire, fire harder, harder!"

We fired until the barrels of our guns became red-hot. The enemy turned. The victims of our fire already lying in heaps in No Man's Land between our lines and the enemy's were increased by hundreds. The attack was repulsed.

It is dark, and it rains and rains. All about us in the darkness are heard the wounded weeping, moaning, imploring. Their cries are augmented by other wounded closer by. All called for bandages, but we had none left. We tore strips from our muddy shirts and with them covered the gaping wounds. Men are dying constantly. There are no doctors, no bandages, nothing. The wounded must be assisted, but first the French must be repulsed.

The rain falls harder constantly and we are all wet to the skin. We shoot blindly into the night. The fluctuating fire of musketry becomes strong, then weaker, then strong again.

We pioneers are scattered among the infantry. My neighbor touches me.

"Say," he calls.

"What do you want?" I ask. "Who are you?"

"Come here," he hissed.

It is eerie, alone in this devil's night.

"Why are you here? Will you murder me like those over there. Soon they will return from over there and the fun will be on again. Do you hear the others weep?"

And he laughed.

Suddenly he started again: "I always shoot at them until they stop weeping. That is fun."

And again he laughed, maniacally, and louder than before.

I realized finally that this man had lost his reason. A man passed bringing ammunition and I asked him to fetch the commander at once. The officer arrived, accompanied by an infantry lieutenant. I met them and reported that my neighbor had been firing on the wounded, talking nonsense, and undoubtedly was insane. The lieutenant stepped between us.

"Can you see anything?" he asked.

"See! No. But I hear them moaning and weeping. As soon as I hit one he is quiet for he sleeps!"

The lieutenant nodded to me. He tried to take the gun from the man, but the latter seized it quickly and sprang back to cover. From there he fired while standing among the wounded, until a moment later, he himself fell, riddled by many bullets.

The drama had only a few spectators. It was hardly over before it was forgotten. Anything but sentiment.

The blind firing continued. The cries of the wounded became constantly louder.

Why? These wounded lying between the two fighting lines are exposed to the firing of both parties. No one can help them for it would be insanity to venture into No Man's Land.

Ever louder and with more heart-rending pleadings, the wounded called for the stretchers, for help, for water. At the most a curse or an oath is the only response.

Our trench was filled with several inches of water and underneath that, mud. In this morass lay dead and wounded, thrown together. It became necessary to make room and so the dead were thrown over the ramparts. At one o'clock in the night men came with stretchers and took away some of the wounded, but for those wretches lying in No Man's Land there was no help.

CHAPTER VII.

To complete our misery, we received orders during the night to attack the French at 4:15 in the morning. We made our preparations under a pouring rain. Promptly at 4:15 we went over the top, jumping over corpses and wounded men. We were forced to retire before a hail of machine gun fire, and sustaining a large number of unnecessary casualties.

Hardly had we regained our trenches when the French attacked us. They came within three meters of our trench, and here their attack broke down under our fire. They too had to retire with fearful losses.

Three times in two hours the French attacked, always with heavy losses and no results. We were at our wit's end. Unless help came soon it would be impossible for us to hold the position. We were tortured by hunger and thirst as well as being wet to the skin and were so exhausted that we could hardly stand.

(Continued Tuesday.)

WIGRICH ITEMS

Mr. and Mrs. Walter Plant and two children and Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Porterfield and two children motored to Albany Saturday evening.

Misses Lena Tobey and Mildred and Beatric Morse of Albany are visiting Miss Evelyn Tobey.

Mr. and Mrs. F. L. Chown and son, Ernest, spent Sunday at McMinnville.

Mr. and. George DeForest motored to Albany and Corvallis Sunday.

Mr. and Mrs. F. L. Chown and Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Porterfield were callers at the E. M. Lichty home at Buena Vista on Monday evening.

Will Roberts of Highland and Mr. McComas of Wigrich combined business with pleasure in Salem on Wednesday.

Mrs. Ralph Bartholomew and Ray Henton of Perrydale and Mrs. Rhoda Green and son, Jay, of Dallas, spent Wednesday evening and Thursday with Mr. and Mrs. Harry Stratton.

KINGS VALLEY

Mrs. D. E. Moore of Albany, who has been visiting Mrs. Della Miller went to Corvallis Saturday.

Mr. and Mrs. Martin Christenson and Mrs. A. B. Senger motored to Corvallis Saturday to visit relatives.

Andy Ayers and A. B. Senger were Corvallis visitors Saturday.

Bruce Miller has bought a car.

Mrs. D. E. Moore and Mrs. Della Miler and children visited Tuesday with Mrs. Wm. Smith.

We understand Independence will celebrate the Fourth of July with Kings Valley this year.

Mrs. Wm. Moser is on the sick list.

Christensons have bought an auto truck to haul lumber.